

HPG Policy Brief

Turning learning into action

Enabling pastoralist livelihood systems in the Horn of Africa

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Governments, donors and other international actors have been slow to recognise the contribution of pastoralist systems to national wealth in the Horn of Africa¹, or to develop appropriate development policies and sustainable interventions to support them. Although the type and effectiveness of the development aid pastoralist communities in the Horn receive has long been questioned, shortcomings on the part of national and international actors continue to preclude a coordinated response that could substantively support the strengths of these robust livelihood systems, better harness the opportunities that pastoralist economies offer in dryland areas and address the causes of vulnerability amongst pastoralists.

This HPG Policy Brief argues the need for national strategies, ideally integrated within a regional framework, to guide development actors and help enhance the impact of aid interventions. There is also a need to close the gap between the theory and practice of pastoral development by supporting longer-term investments and programme strategies, ensuring that good practices are adopted, and bridging the gap between development and emergency relief efforts.

¹This HPG Policy Brief primarily focuses on Ethiopia and Kenya, where lessons can be distilled and best practices have emerged. In Somalia, the ongoing humanitarian crisis has meant that there has been less progress and experimentation in this sector.



Boran elder

Photo: Cary Farley

Strengths and challenges of pastoralist systems

Pastoralist livelihood strategies have evolved over centuries in response to the low and erratic rainfall and diverse ecosystems typical of the arid and semi-arid lands pastoralists inhabit. Key strategies include accessing and managing natural resources (mainly grazing land and water sources), employing a variety of herd management strategies (splitting, diversification and maximisation) and maintaining high levels of mobility across large tracts of land, to make the most effective use of scarce resources.



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These sophisticated strategies to manage natural resources over time and space have allowed pastoralists to adaptively manage the threats and risks that characterise their eco-system, enabling them to maintain a viable and resilient production and livelihood system for centuries².

In recent decades, however, these strategies have come under significant strain, and the capacity of pastoralists to resist or recover from drought-related shocks has been progressively undermined. The impact of recurrent droughts over the past decades in the Horn of Africa has often been disastrous, causing massive livestock losses, acute rates of malnutrition and high morbidity and mortality among pastoralist communities.

Photo: Cary Farley



Pastoralist children

Pastoralists' vulnerability is seen by some, especially in government circles, as an indicator that their livelihoods are unsustainable, and that they should be helped to settle to undertake farming or other productive activities. However, vulnerability is not merely linked to natural factors or inherent inefficiencies in the pastoral system, but is also a function of wider political and socio-economic processes and institutional constraints. Bias and a lack of political interest in pastoral areas have often driven inappropriate national policies to encourage pastoral communities to settle, constrain mobility, privatise or alienate common resources and undermine the customary institutions critical to effectively manage the rangelands.

Until recently there has been very little recognition of the importance of pastoral livelihoods for national economies, and little appreciation of the importance of livestock as an economic resource. This failure to

understand and value pastoral systems has resulted in a dearth of appropriate interventions and investment in pastoral areas and in pastoralists' livelihood systems.

Lack of common vision and integration in pastoral development initiatives

A growing body of research has demonstrated that pastoralist systems in dryland Africa and other regions are robust, flexible, economically productive and well adapted to local environments³. Yet despite ever-increasing evidence attesting to the viability of pastoralist systems, pastoralists continue to be seen in many influential circles as backward and unproductive. As a result, pastoral development issues often

remain on the margins of international, regional and national policy circles and debates. Even the emerging evidence of the correlation between dryland pastoralists' vulnerability and the adverse effects of climate change has been insufficient to encourage a serious reorientation of the development discourse and assistance in pastoral areas. International development policy in the region focuses mainly on

agriculture and rural livelihoods, with pastoral development issues sidelined, conflated with agricultural issues or overshadowed by a predominant focus on emergency responses. The same is true among donors. The US government, for instance, has yet to prioritise pastoral and drylands development⁴, and DFID has no comprehensive policy on its engagement in pastoral development, despite both supporting a range of interventions in pastoral areas.⁵

Similarly, early warning systems such as FEWS Net and the FAO's Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) do not put sufficient emphasis on pastoralist livelihoods. The FEWS Net livelihood security information system provides analysts with a means to predict and judge the impact of a shock on household income and food access.

²Pavanello (2009)

³Hesse and MacGregor (2006) and Hatfield and Davies (2007)

⁴Wolgin (2009)

⁵Morton (2008)

Photo: Cary Farley

*Pastoralist herd livestock*

However, the East Africa Regional Food Security Outlook maintains a heavy focus on agriculture, and has very little information of relevance to pastoralist systems.⁶ The IPC is designed to improve food security analysis and decision-making through a standardised scale, and has generally been seen as a useful instrument to attract attention to impending crises. However, '[its] analysis of the livestock and pastoral sectors and links with existing and developing livestock early warning systems remain insufficient'.⁷ Furthermore, very little of this information ever reaches the relevant communities or facilitates real action. The picture is the same at the regional and national level. Pastoralism has not yet become a policy priority for key regional bodies such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development in Eastern Africa (IGAD). Nationally, long-standing negative perceptions of pastoralism continue to influence decision-makers. For example, despite increased attention to pastoral-related issues and pastoral areas in recent years, Ethiopia often encourages pastoral communities to settle and take up agriculture.⁸

International, regional and national biases against pastoralism are a reflection of the failure of national governments to appreciate the important role played by pastoral economies in the Horn. In Kenya, despite its strong subsistence orientation, pastoralism is economically productive and significant. With a total livestock population of 60 million, livestock production in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) accounts for nearly 90% of the livelihood base and nearly 95% of family income.⁹ The livestock sector in Kenya

contributes 12% of total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 42% of agricultural GDP.¹⁰ However, poor infrastructure and inadequate market development in pastoral areas limit the opportunities for livestock marketing, and veterinary services are insufficient to prevent widespread mortality and loss of animal condition resulting from epidemics.¹¹ Crucially, the lack of adequate or effective political representation at the national level in most countries in the Horn makes it difficult to get pastoral issues onto national and regional political and development agendas.

Key inefficiencies in the response

There is growing recognition amongst many researchers and development analysts that pastoralists' vulnerability can only be mitigated through long-term development interventions and investments aimed at building the resilience of pastoral livelihoods, strengthening pastoralist institutions, building up social and economic infrastructure and fostering cross-border linkages, especially around marketing and trade. There is also broad acceptance of the need for better links between humanitarian and development efforts in drought-prone environments, with a shift from short-term, predominantly food aid responses to drought to longer-term initiatives centred on the promotion of pastoralist livelihoods through enhanced access to services and market infrastructure. However, despite increased understanding of best practices and strategies, the implementation of innovative policies and approaches remains deficient. Recent reviews of responses in Kenya and Ethiopia during the 2005–2006 drought found that donors continued to strongly favour emergency assistance over meaningful livelihoods support.¹² Even when interventions depart from food aid and aim to strengthen the resilience of pastoral communities, short funding cycles – often 12 months or less – and the consequent short lifespan of most programmes limit the possibility of effecting any lasting change. Sizeable long-term development interventions to expand services, support marketing infrastructure and strengthen customary governance systems are limited.

⁶FEWS Net (2010)

⁷Nicholson et al (2008)

⁸Mussa (2004) and Elias (2008)

⁹Kenya Ministry of Agriculture (2008)

¹⁰SNV (2008)

¹¹Longley and Wekesa (2008) and Hesse and MacGregor (2009)

¹²Pantuliano and Wekesa (2008) and Longley and Wekesa (2008)

Photo: Cary Farley

*Camels going to market*

External engagement in pastoral areas is also fragmented. There is a lack of leadership from national governments and no strong counterpoint from affected populations. The neglect of pastoral areas is often not malicious or ill-intentioned, but stems more from a lack of familiarity on the part of decision-makers with the dryland areas of both Ethiopia and Kenya, and a lack of understanding of how pastoralist livelihoods function. Many government officials in charge of pastoral issues are not themselves pastoralists and many have never even been to a pastoral area, and thus do not fully understand the complex nature of livelihoods there. Even when policies are more progressive, a lack of resources and political will means that implementation is difficult, or that strategies are pursued in the absence of policy. Policies are rarely reviewed once approved, and more policies are added each year without necessarily fitting with existing ones. Planning is also not properly linked to policy or to resource allocation, and typically neither is driven by priorities from the ground. There is a lack of coordination between government ministries, and many aspects of pastoralist livelihoods seem to fall under multiple ministries, each of which tends to work in isolation. The budgeting system, particularly in Kenya, reinforces the status quo, with ministries competing for funds rather than collaborating. For political reasons, funds tend to be allocated equally at constituency level, rather than equitably on the basis of need.

NGOs are among the more experienced and informed actors in pastoral areas, but they too often lack a coherent long-term strategy for change. Given the broader institutional context, NGOs frequently end

up having to tailor their programmes in pursuit of donor funding and wider trends in assistance. Hence, rather than maintaining an overarching, coherent strategy for

pastoral development and outlining the role of pastoral livelihood support within it, NGOs often have to exploit other opportunities for funding and use entry points such as Disaster Risk Reduction, climate change, conflict resolution, emergency response and gender, and then redirect funds to pastoral livelihoods support. In addition, while there are positive examples of successful collaboration, competition for funding and a highly protective attitude towards their areas of operation mean that NGOs are not always willing to openly cooperate with one another or develop more collaborative approaches. Meanwhile, international NGOs are subject to the same biases as donors and governments, with limited cadres of experienced and informed personnel, often isolated within their organisations. The lack of integration and cross-fertilisation between emergency and development sections in many organisations also appears to be a key limitation to the implementation of more appropriate livelihoods responses. Very few organisations have integrated programmes where emergency response and development interventions are managed under the same framework and management structure. These difficulties exist even in organisations that have emergency personnel with good livelihoods backgrounds.¹³ High staff turnover and a project-based operating style also make the development of a common, long-term vision and continuity of support difficult for most NGOs.

Similar forces are at play within UN agencies - fragmentation, limited expertise, staff turnover, dichotomies between humanitarian and development interventions - though by and large UN agencies tend to be less competent in this area even than NGOs. Fragmentation of response capacity is also a problem. The lead UN agency on pastoralist issues, FAO, is mainly concerned with livestock issues, rather than pastoralist livelihoods more broadly. The World Bank approach¹⁴ has attracted criticism among analysts and practitioners in Ethiopia for its lack of collaboration with in-country international actors.¹⁵

¹³Pantuliano and Wekesa (2008)

¹⁴The World Bank funds two significant interventions in the pastoral areas of Kenya and Ethiopia, respectively the Arid Lands Resource Management Project (ALRMP) and the Pastoral

Towards a more integrated approach: examples of best practice

Recent research, advocacy and project piloting in the Horn of Africa have given rise to a growing, albeit as yet limited, number of examples of institutions and initiatives at national and regional levels that are well attuned to pastoralist realities and which have been experimenting with coordination mechanisms, longer-term funding and better use of research and learning.

The mechanisms that have been developed have led to collaborative initiatives in operational responses. A good example of collaboration is the Pastoralist Livelihoods Initiative (PLI 1), a two-year programme in the Somali, Afar and Oromia regions of Ethiopia implemented by a group of international NGOs and funded by USAID. Although the PLI suffered from familiar problems of coordination and competition between the participant NGOs, it achieved a number of encouraging results. The programme focused on enhancing early-warning systems, increasing access to markets, improving livestock production and facilitating policy reform. It also managed a successful response to the 2005-2006 drought in Ethiopia through innovative emergency livelihoods interventions, notably commercial destocking at the onset of the crisis. Many in the Ethiopian government, particularly in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD), have followed with interest the work of the PLI and feel that it should be supported and replicated, and accompanied by fundamental work at the policy level.¹⁶ The style of collaborative programming pioneered by the PLI was founded on a shared commitment to a set of agreed priorities and deliverables and a common approach. This approach was taken forward at a regional level by the USAID-funded Enhanced Livelihoods in Mendera Triangle/Enhanced Livelihoods in Southern Ethiopia (ELMT/ELSE) programme,¹⁷ although the two-year timeframe and the additional challenges of working at a regional level in a difficult and often unstable environment have limited its impact. Nonetheless, ELMT has stimulated learning and promoted innovative approaches, such as linking Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs) with private vet

pharmacies, supporting early response planning and protection of livelihoods, encouraging improved camel husbandry, establishing the Ethiopian Camel Forum, supporting customary institutions and facilitating learning on Natural Resource Management (NRM). The programme has also initiated the development of a framework for cross-border peace building that has been welcomed by many of the key actors in the region.¹⁸ However, ELMT/ELSE was also hampered by the limited timeframe of the programme, bureaucratic delays and a lack of flexibility on all sides, including the donor, and the challenges of managing a consortium in a highly volatile and complex region.¹⁹

Positive steps have also been taken in extending the timeframes of interventions in pastoral areas. The PLI partners in Ethiopia successfully lobbied USAID to add a third year to the PLI, and subsequently to make PLI II a four-year rather than two-year programme. ELMT-ELSE was able to extend its programme for an additional nine months, while the US Government's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) has begun experimenting with three-year award mechanisms and is considering cross-border approaches. The European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) has also made some progress in this respect, with the timeframe for its Regional Drought Decision (RDD) being extended to 18 months from the 12 months typical of ECHO-funded interventions. However, an 18-month timeframe is still inadequate for meaningful disaster risk mitigation activities – and even four years is only a beginning.



Grazing area

Photo: Cary Farley

¹⁵Telephone interviews with key stakeholders in Ethiopia.

¹⁶Pantuliano and Wekesa (2008)

¹⁷ELMT/ELSE is a component of the Regional Enhanced Livelihoods in Pastoral Areas (RELPA) programme in East Africa. The ELMT/ELSE Consortium represented a partnership of international NGOs with considerable experience and understanding of food and livelihood security in the Horn of Africa, especially in pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihood zones.

¹⁸Nicholson and Desta (2010)

¹⁹Fowler and McMahon (2010)

An interesting new feature of programming in pastoral areas of the Horn is the partnership between NGOs and academic institutions with expertise in pastoral issues. The Feinstein International Center (FIC) at Tufts University in the United States has helped PLI partners to harmonise approaches and maximise the impact of their interventions through training on impact assessment. Similar partnerships existed but often functioned less well for the ELMT consortium, due in part to difficulties in coordinating under the wider RELPA, (the umbrella USAID-funded programme). Under RELPA, FIC also managed the Pastoral Areas Coordination, Analysis and Policy Support (PACAPS) activity that was instrumental in supporting COMESA's policy work, which has led to the inclusion of pastoralism and livestock issues in regional policy frameworks. Other partnerships between NGOs and research institutes include the ongoing learning support provided by the Humanitarian Policy Group to the ECHO-funded Regional Resilience Enhancement Against Drought (RREAD) programme implemented by CARE, which focuses on cross-border issues and the development of a integrated cross-border programme.

At the national level, the most encouraging new element in the institutional structure of the Horn of Africa has been the creation of the Ministry of State for Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands (MSDNKOAL) in Kenya. The formation of the new ministry represents an important step towards the establishment of a governmental authority with the political leverage and capacity to take forward pastoral issues within the national policy-making process. Donors and a select number of NGO partners, including members of the ELMT consortium, (e.g. CARE-Kenya and Oxfam-GB), have provided critical support to a number of its initiatives and helped to develop a new long-term strategy through an extensive consultative process. An option currently being discussed is the creation of an autonomous, permanent development agency combining the management of drought response and development initiatives in the Arid Lands of Kenya, administering two separate funds under an overall body. The creation of such an agency would help provide continuity for Arid Lands development in the event of ministerial restructuring, reduce competition with other ministries and allow for a more integrated approach. It is important to note, however, that the existence of a body such as

MSDNKOAL remains the exception rather than the norm.

Positive developments at the policy level have also taken place in Ethiopia. In 2009 the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development published a ground-breaking set of national guidelines for Livestock Relief Interventions in the Pastoralist Areas of Ethiopia. The guidelines emphasise the importance of livelihood-based responses to drought beyond food aid. Interventions highlighted include destocking, livestock feed supplementation, emergency water supply for livestock, emergency veterinary care and, in the drought recovery phase, restocking. ELSE partners are using the guidelines and OCHA's Humanitarian Response Fund (HRF) requires funding recipients to follow them. As a result of the progress made in Ethiopia on livestock policy, an estimated \$5 million has been channelled into livestock relief interventions. Participatory Impact Assessments carried out by FIC show that significant benefit/ cost ratios are now being achieved.²⁰

Encouraging progress at the regional level has also been made in policy terms. The African Union New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has promoted the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), which in East Africa is being led by COMESA, with the aim of developing a regional food security policy. Within this process there is now a specific element dealing with vulnerable communities including pastoralists. IGAD has also developed new pro-poor livestock policies through the IGAD Livestock Policy Initiative (IGAD LPI). The concept of a 'Livestock/Pastoralism Secretariat' for the Horn of Africa was endorsed in December 2009 by the IGAD Council of Ministers. IGAD has also been implementing the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN), which uses peace monitors to collect information on conflict and peace building issues. This information is used by local and national-level response units to encourage dispute resolution at local, national and regional levels.

At the regional level, there have been increased efforts to develop operational interventions such as ELMT and RELPA, as well as joint regional advocacy initiatives such as the ECHO-funded Regional Livelihoods Advocacy Project (REGLAP) and RREAD. Both in ELMT and REGLAP, agencies have come together to propose joint initiatives in response to

²⁰Catley et al (2008)

funding opportunities. Despite the difficulties of operating in consortium models, these initiatives show that there is a willingness to overcome divisions and explore synergies. There has also been increased attention to developing and implementing functional cross-border programmes such as RREAD. Although difficulties persist in this area, an ELMT-supported cross-border peace meeting between Kenyan and Ethiopian pastoralists in November, 2009, attended by the Minister of MSDNKOAL and the Ethiopian Minister for Federal Affairs, suggests that governments are realising the importance of working together to address cross-border issues.

From fragmentation to integration: a nationally-led common strategy and an integrated regional framework for pastoralism in the Horn

Political will among governments and a recognition of the importance of pastoralists are essential to develop policies that promote pastoralists' interests and sustainable dryland development. Effective support to pastoralists needs to be vested in strong institutional, management and coordination structures able to harmonise mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery and development activities among the many actors involved. In order to strengthen government commitment and action in support of pastoralists, international partners aligned with local counterparts must work to change negative perceptions of pastoralism and bring pastoral development to the fore of international and national development agendas. National governments need to be persuaded that they have much to gain by doing so, in terms of their economies, human resources, security and stability. Systematic, well-coordinated and appropriately targeted advocacy interventions are required, which should be championed by sympathetic high-profile national actors and publicised in the national and regional media. A strong and well-coordinated platform is needed to advocate for policy changes aimed at strengthening pastoralist livelihoods through investment in services, better livestock marketing (through for instance improved roads, stronger veterinary services and lower taxes during droughts) and increased access to land and other key resources.²¹ International NGOs are particularly well placed to inform and support these advocacy initiatives.

Advocacy should not stop at the level of policy. To date, too much advocacy has focused on policy



Photo: CARE Ethiopia

Livestock supplementary feeding

content, and too little on how to get things done on the ground. If governments were supported so that they functioned more efficiently, changes in pastoral areas could come about naturally, as policy and practice would finally be driven from below, better rooted in evidence, judged on their merits and benchmarked against international practice. Again, international NGOs should promote practice-oriented advocacy reflecting on the many lessons learned in the region over the last three decades. Pastoralists and the civil society organisations that represent them should also be supported to advocate for themselves through systematic initiatives bringing together pastoralist representatives and national and local government authorities.

Developing a regional framework which can harness positive policies and practices and influence negative ones is also important. International NGOs, UN agencies and donors should build on their respective strengths to work with different parts of the system in a coordinated and strategic fashion.

This information is used by local and national-level response units to encourage dispute resolution at local, national and regional levels. Interventions aimed at strengthening the role of governments at the national and sub-national levels should proceed in parallel with initiatives to foster a common vision for the region. Progressive experiments limited to isolated projects must become more mainstream, with donors championing good practice with peers and NGOs, lobbying to make sure that pioneering efforts by individuals within donor agencies become standard practice and include government partners. The continued dichotomy between relief and development approaches in policies, structures and capacities needs to be overcome once and for all.

²¹Pantuliano and Wekesa (2008)

Pastoralists themselves do not differentiate between developmental and relief assistance, and both must support the potential of pastoral economies, as well as address the growing vulnerability of pastoralist communities. The impact of climate change makes the need for complementarity particularly urgent, given the increasing frequency and severity of drought, in which drought cycles now overlap with one another so that pastoralists are still recovering from one drought when the next one sets in. Donors should work closely with national governments and support national efforts to establish more streamlined structures such as in Kenya.

The importance of dryland pastoralism for the economic growth and stability of Kenya and Ethiopia and other parts of the Horn of Africa cannot be underscored enough. In such a fragile yet potentially productive ecosystem, pastoralism is the most economically viable production system available - and the most environmentally sustainable. No other productive sector can effectively absorb so many people at present or provide for more effective use of land. Current efforts at improving development and humanitarian practice in pastoral areas are encouraging and should be commended, but the various actors operating in the drylands of the HoA need to take more radical steps to make support to pastoralists more effective and relevant. It is time to move beyond rhetoric and lofty aspirations and translate these debates into more empowering and effective action for people in the drylands, helping pastoralists to draw on their long-honed skills to manage their environment and strengthen the resilience of their livelihood systems for the benefit of all.

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